



## **Social and Environmental Education Specification – Frequently Asked Questions**

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### **1. What is Social and Environmental Education?**

Social and Environmental Education or SEE for short, is one of five curriculum areas in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum for primary and special schools. It explores social, environmental, cultural, religious and political themes through history and geography. It helps children appreciate nature and understand different human experiences, both past and present, while highlighting the links and connections between people and the natural world.

Social and Environmental Education looks at personal, Irish, European and global issues—past, present and future. It helps children understand local, national and global events and challenges, and supports them in becoming active, informed, and responsible citizens who value and care for the world around them.

Social and Environmental Education also encourages children to understand how systems and events shape their world, recognise their role in caring for the planet and take part in society in a fair, kind and sustainable way.

### **2. What is different about Social and Environmental Education in the redeveloped curriculum compared to Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) in the 1999 curriculum?**

Firstly, since 1999, geography, history and science were grouped together under the curriculum area known as Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). This is changing. Science is now part of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education. History and Geography will remain together but now form a new area called Social and Environmental Education, which also includes learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews.

Secondly, learning and teaching within Social and Environmental Education is now framed by global learning themes (see graphic below). These include human rights, democracy, equity, social and environmental justice and sustainable development. These overarching themes support an integrated approach and represent the ‘big ideas’ underpinning this curriculum area.

Thirdly, children’s learning will differ depending on what stage or class they are in. In Stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants – 2<sup>nd</sup> Class) learning will be fully integrated with no separation between history and geography. In Stages 3 and 4 (3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Class), learning will become more subject-based, with distinctions between history and geography.

Fourthly, the Social and Environmental Education specification does not prescribe specific topics to be taught in working towards the Learning Outcomes at each stage or class level. This shift emphasises the importance of developing the concepts and skills of working as historians and geographers. Instead, schools will have agency in deciding, at a local level, upon topics that best reflect the needs, interests, abilities and curiosities of their children and their local context. The aim is to enable children to work as historians and work as geographers. The selection and

planning of topics will be supported through whole-school curriculum planning and specific support materials developed for teachers.

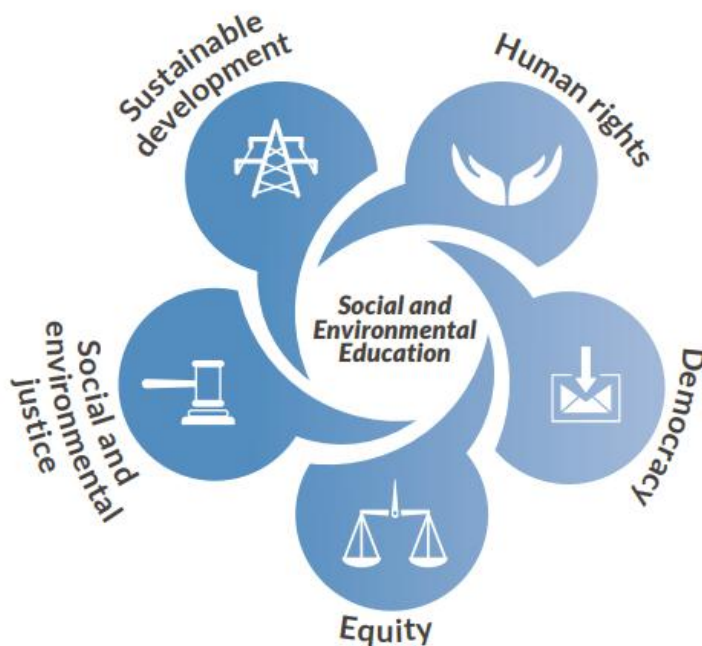


Figure 1: The Global Learning Themes (p. 42)

### 3. How much time is allocated for *Social and Environmental Education*?

Here is the suggested minimum time for Social and Environmental Education as provided in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*:

Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants)	6 hours per month
Stage 2 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> classes)	9 hours per month
Stages 3 and 4 (3 <sup>rd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> Class)	8 hours per month

In addition to these suggested minimum time allocations, schools may also draw on flexible time to further support Social and Environmental Education – up to 5 hours per month at Stage 1, 6 hours per month in Stage 2, and up to 7 hours per month at Stages 3 and 4.

#### 4. What is at the heart of Social and Environmental Education?

The primary curriculum has seven key competencies which overlap and combine to support the curriculum's vision. The competencies build on children's early childhood education experiences with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and are further strengthened in post-primary school in Junior Cycle. As children work towards the Learning Outcomes in this curriculum area, they build and develop these key competencies.

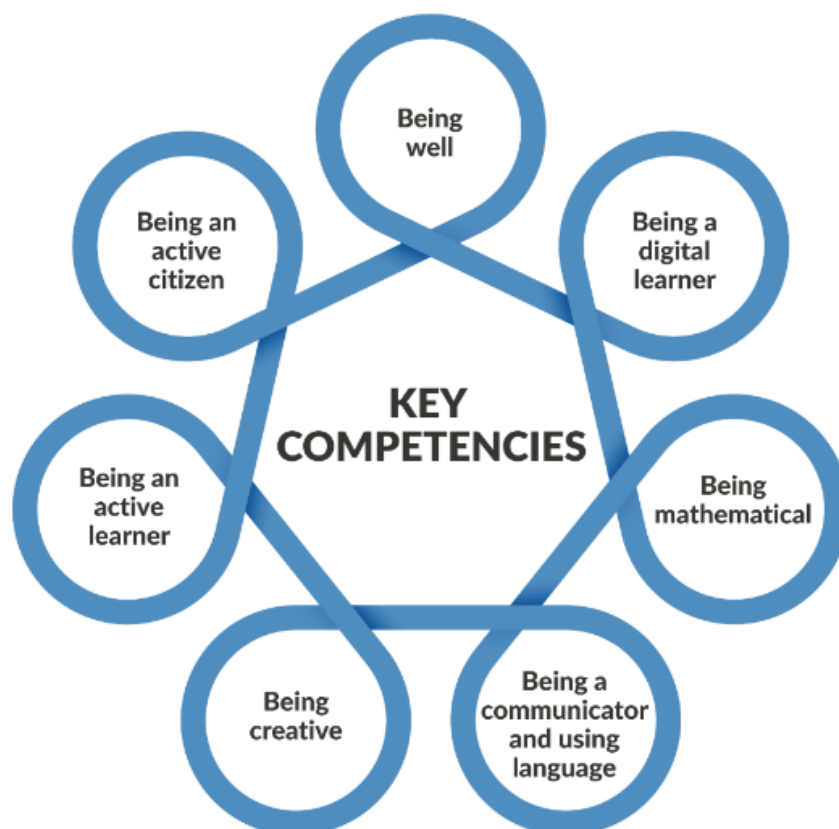


Figure 2: Key Competencies (p. 15)

Skills are developed by children in every curriculum area. In the course of their learning, children also develop concepts - that is general ideas or notions. The concepts and skills of children working as geographers and working as historians, like the Key Competencies, lie at the heart of Social and Environmental Education. They underpin children's learning in this curriculum area. Teachers and schools will have flexibility and choice in choosing topics that will support children in developing their skills and concepts.

As children work as historians and geographers, these are the concepts and skills will they learn and experience:

## Concepts and Skills of 'Working as a Historian' and 'Working as a Geographer'

Concepts	Skills
Empathy	Questioning
Multi-perspectivity	Investigating
Cause and effect	Using evidence and sources
Change and continuity	Interpreting and analysing
Time and chronology	Evaluating and decision-making
Sense of environment and sustainability	Communicating
Sense of place	Mapping / Graphicacy
Sense of place	Visual Interpretation and communication
	Chronological thinking
	Historical thinking

### 5. In *Social and Environmental Education*, what are the main categories of learning?

The main categories of learning, setting out the content, across Social and Environmental Education (history and geography) are:

- My locality
- The island of Ireland
- Europe and the wider world.

Each of these categories is further broken down into:

- Identity and heritage
- Environment and sustainable living
- People and places.

The content for this curriculum area is presented as Learning Outcomes from Stages 1 - 4 (Junior Infants to 6<sup>th</sup> class) in Chapter 5 of the specification.

### 6. How will children learn in *Social and Environmental Education*?

There are three main ways in which children will learn in SEE. They are through:

- inquiring

- communicating
- understanding and connecting

Through **inquiring**, children will engage with a range of evidence, generate questions, make inferences, seek clarification and investigate curriculum-based topics in depth.

As children engage in exploration and investigation, they will be **communicating** their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through various forms of expression. Children will focus on **understanding and making connections** between people and places – locally, nationally, at European level and globally – as well as between the past and present.

## **7. What are the pedagogical approaches which are bespoke to *Social and Environmental Education*?**

Inquiry will provide opportunities for children to actively engage in historical and geographical thinking and investigation in authentic contexts.

Place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors will allow children to engage directly with their surroundings, working as historians and as geographers, in real-life, meaningful contexts.

The use of story in SEE will support children's understanding of historical events and the lives and experiences of people in the past. Engaging with stories will foster empathy, allowing children to relate to others' experiences and perspectives.

## **8. What is learning about Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews in *Social and Environmental Education*?**

The inclusion of learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews is somewhat new to the curriculum for primary and special schools. This is to support children's awareness, appreciation and understanding of the rich diversity of religions, beliefs and worldviews in different times, places and circumstances. Worldviews are a framework of beliefs, values and attitudes that can be religious, philosophical, moral, personal, or a combination of these. Children's learning in this area will not be denominational or religious, but rather they will learn about religions, beliefs and worldviews through history and geography, working as historians and as geographers. As such learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews within Social and Environmental Education is separate to Religious, Ethical, Multi-belief and Values Education – the Patron's Programme that also forms part of the curriculum.

## **9. What is the relationship between learning about Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews in *Social and Environmental Education* and the 'Religious, Ethical, Multi-belief and Values Education - the Patron's Programme' of the school?**

While religions, beliefs and worldviews within SEE is distinct from a school's Patron's Programme, the two, when taught through an inclusive lens, can offer complementary learning experiences.

Religions, beliefs and worldview within SEE provides all children with a broad exploration of major religions, beliefs and worldviews, focusing on their cultural, historical, and societal dimensions.

The Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to children's holistic development, particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective, and underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. Some programmes are denominational or religious, emphasising the place of children's faith, spiritual, and moral development in their lives. Some are ethical or multi-belief and values-based and emphasise children's understanding of ethics and values and their application in the life of the child. While distinct, together, the learning experiences provided through the SEE specification and the Patron's Programme can support children in developing a well-rounded appreciation of both shared human values and the diverse ways in which people make meaning in their lives.

## **10. What is the role of commercial programmes, accompanying textbooks and digital learning in *Social and Environmental Education*?**

The function of commercial programmes and accompanying textbooks is to help children's learning and to assist teachers in preparing for the Learning Outcomes in Chapter 5 of the specification. Social and Environmental Education places great emphasis on play and playful pedagogy, inquiry, place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors and story. This means a reduced opportunity for commercial programmes and textbooks in this curriculum area. Both the content of the commercial programmes and accompanying textbooks and the way they are used will change. In working towards the Learning Outcomes of the curriculum there will be greater opportunities for learning with digital tools for example virtual field trips, multi-media presentations, digital mapping or other online simulations.